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ABSTRACT

A 1979 external evaluation of the Eckerd Wilderness Educational System (a series of 9 residential, therapeutic camps for disturbed youth in 3 eastern states) drew data from 3 sources: records of the first 1,385 youth entered into the camps from 1968 through November 1979, test results from the most recent 157 clients who completed both entry and exit tests, and compilation of post-program legal records and personal questionnaire results for 224 ex-clients who had been released from the program for 2 to 11 years. Specific goals of the Eckerd Program were improvement of understanding of self and others, self-image, self-help skills, family relationships and basic educational skills. Findings indicated a significant improvement in self-concept, personality adjustment, academic skill level, and various observed behaviors. Ex-client interviews were supportive of the program, and there was some evidence of improved adjustment after treatment. (Author/CM)

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EVALUATION OF A RESIDENTIAL THERAPEUTIC CAMPING PROGRAM FOR DISTURBED CHILDREN

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Running head: Evaluation of a Residential Therapeutic Camping Program

Abstract

This paper describes the findings of an external evaluation conducted on a residential, therapeutic camp for disturbed youth. The evaluation strategy consisted of defining program objectives, gathering descriptive data on entering clients, administering entry and exit tests, and interviewing ex-clients. Findings indicate a significant improvement in self-concept, personality adjustment, academic skill level, and various observed behaviors. Ex-client interviews were supportive of the program and there was some evidence of improved adjustment after treatment.

Evaluation of a Residential Therapeutic Camping Program for Disturbed Children

Introduction

Social organizations, faced with the dilemma of meeting the expanding needs of a complex society and increasing demands on available resources, have been forced to improve their approaches and demonstrate the impact of their program's effectiveness with more defensible evidence than have often been used in the past. The emergence of increased civil rights mandates have reinforced opinions that the manipulation of disadvantaged, distressed or susceptible clients solely on intuitive grounds cannot be ethically justified. It then falls upon these organizations to move closer to Wildavsky's (1978) organizational ideal -- the self-evaluating organization.

> The ideal organization would be self-evaluating. It would continuously monitor its own activities so as to determine whether it was meeting its goals . . . . when evaluation suggested that a change . . . was desirable, these proposals would be taken seriously by top decision makers. (p. 82)

As a private agency seeking increased public support for a program described as innovative and developmental, the Eckerd Wilderness Educational System (EWES) comes under special scrutiny. The result has been a concentration on evidence of program impact.

Program Evolution

Therapeutic camping has existed for a long time -- Steven Apter (1977) suggests that its roots can be traced to the writings of Rousseau and Thoreau. In the 1930's, the elements of therapeutic camping combined with evolving concerns for mental health; the formalization of technique was

further aided by the encounter group movement of Kurt Lewin, Carl Rogers and others.

The romance of camping is very much a part of the American heritage, making it highly acceptable as a youth activity. This point is recognized by such youth organizations as Scouting and YMCA/YWCA. Significantly, parents of disturbed children are often more willing to use a camp than a clinical situation for treatment as the camp carries fewer adverse labels.

The therapeutic process is not dependent upon the camp environment but the out-of-doors does provide a wealth of opportunity for tailoring situations to meet the needs of behavioral modification. In a primitive setting, the results of specific behaviors are more apparent than they would be in more normal structures. Further, the constant demand on coping ability and problem-solving, created by the camp setting, can produce graphic impact on self-esteem and personal awareness.

Therapeutic camping removes the child from the environment that may have contributed to the disturbance and substitutes a new, more spartan context -- one that is physically and emotionally secure but situationally demanding. There, the child participates in a treatment process involving intense, small-group interaction. This treatment emphasizes living situations in which each group member is a necessary, contributory partner. It involves creative experiences, group and self-analysis, goal development, interpersonal relationships, parental counseling and close relationships with positive adult role models. The intent is to modify deviant behavior, increase self-esteem and confidence and improve coping skills to such an extent that changes are more likely to continue after the artificial environment is removed.

In 1947, the Dallas Salesmanship Club, a local service organization,

expanded a summer camp program for underprivileged children into a year-long, pilot program for disturbed youth (Loughmiller, 1976). In this program, the youngsters were placed in small groups of eight to ten individuals with two live-in counselors. The youth were required to provide for their own care, shelter and meals. This camp experiment stressed coping with the basic problems of a group living in harsh and elementary surroundings. The principle goal was to help the individual successfully adjust to self and others (Kimsey and Frost, 1969).

In 1968, the Salesmanship Program was brought to Florida by the Eckerd Foundation. The Eckerd Camping System has since expanded into nine camps in three eastern states. The Eckerd program includes all of the previously mentioned elements of therapeutic camping. In addition, during the later part of their stay, the Eckerd program transfers clients to a "transitional classroom" group led by a residential counselor and a teacher. There, although the living situation remains the same as in the previous therapeutic group, the emphasis shifts to meeting specific academic needs and forming transitions to the back-home educational situation. Specific goals outlined by the Eckerd Program are the improvement of understanding of self and others, self-image, self-help skills, family relationships and basic educational skills.

Past Evaluations

Past evaluations of the EWES program have been mostly intuitive and suffered from reliance on unsupportable inferences, incomplete records or sample selection limitations. The most comprehensive study (Ricker and Walker, 1972) was a follow-up analysis of 69 client records and opinions. This report stated that summaries of court records and personal perceptions

of program results indicated improvement in coping skills, school performance, self-esteem and overall behavior patterns. Additionally, in a comparison of the EWES sample with subjects in other state programs, the authors found significant improvement in court records among the EWES subjects.

Recognizing the need for objective, comprehensive and continuous evaluation, EWES contacted the Educational Research and Development Center at The University of West Florida in 1977. The resulting summative evaluation of the EWES program included examination of individual entry files, standardized tests administered upon entry and exit, and follow-up surveys on a selected sample of subjects.

Method

Subjects

Situational realities resulted in dealing with existing Eckerd Foundation clients with little control over their selection for the program or any satisfactory means of studying a comparable outside control group. However, the size of the Eckerd client population was large, and this tended to have an attenuating effect on possible sources of invalidity. The descriptive portion of the evaluation included data from all 1,385 clients since the programs inception in 1968. The analysis of test score shifts included selected data on the most recent clients who underwent a complete test protocol.

Design

The evaluation of the Eckerd program necessitated the development of unique methodology. Over-insistence upon the use of experimental or quasi-experimental research designs or design controls can lead to dead ends when dealing with the "givens" and realities of situations in field evaluation.

Stufflebeam (1971) states:

> Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the evaluator is overcoming the idea that evaluation methodology is identical to research methodology. Equating them forces certain constraints inimical to the purposes of evaluation and makes it impossible to meet certain of the needs served by good evaluation. (p. 22)

Evaluation is the provision of valuable information which enables decision-makers to make more useful decisions. To the extent that evaluation provides valid information (taken within its context of imperfection in a research sense) for those decisions, it is useful. Insisting on overly strict research guidelines has often tended to restrict decision-makers to superficial or intuitive data.

One piece of information essential to decision makers was measurement of program impact upon the stated objectives of EWES. The only evaluation design readily available was a measurement of pertinent characteristics and behaviors of clients upon program entry and the assessment of change after release, a one-group pre-, post-test design. Such a pre-experimental design has several limitations, when judged by research guidelines (e.g. normal maturation, testing effects); however, no alternative design was apparent and the information provided by this approach could provide useful contextual data which, when combined with other inputs, might aid the decision process.

Program Measures

A comprehensive record was maintained on each client. These records were used to describe the clientele being served. To provide individual diagnostic information and to further establish an input description, tests for self-concept, (Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale), adjustment

of personality to self and others (California Test of Personality), verbal and performance intelligence (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised) and academic achievement in reading and math skills (California Achievement Test) were given upon entry. Testing was accomplished by psychometrists trained and supervised by The University of West Florida.

Six weeks after entry, the Devereux Adolescent Behavior Rating Scale was completed on each client by four staff members having knowledge of the clients' behavior. The Devereux has very satisfactory inter-rater reliabilities for an observational instrument (reliabilities ranged from .745 to .907 for institutionalized adolescents) (Spivak, et al, 1967, p. 51). It was hoped that by calculating mean ratings of four observers for each client's observation (only two of which were directly responsible for the clients' improvement) these already acceptable reliabilities would be further improved and any halo effects would be reduced. Ratings by outside observers were rejected as raters must have intimate, long-term association to gain sufficient knowledge in all areas of behavior to accurately complete the instrument (Spivak, et al, 1967, p. 6).

Upon the clients' departure from the program the test battery was again administered to determine areas of significant change. It was assumed that if behavioral changes occurred at a greater rate than had been previously experienced or could be reasonably expected, then the program could either be causing the change or providing an atmosphere where the normal proceesses of maturation were able to function, a condition apparently not present in most of these clients' lives prior to entry into the program. In two tests, the California Achievement Test and the California Test of Personality, the effects of maturation are minimized through the use of varying instrument levels.

Finally, a group of past clients was surveyed to determine program perceptions and post-program experiences. Criminal records on this group were also reviewed.

In summary, three sources provided evaluative data for the study: 1) the first 1,385 entered into the camps from 1968 through 1970; 2) test results from the most recent 157 clients who completed both entry and exit tests; and 3) compilation of post-program legal records and personal questionnaire results for 224 ex-clients who had been released from the program for 2 to 11 years.

Results

The first goal of this evaluation was to document population parameters. This resulted in the following description.

Between the beginning of the EWES program in 1968 and November 1979, 1,385 clients entered the system. Their mean age was 13.3 years and 72.3% were male. During the period to December 1971, 7% were non-caucasian. This proportion increased to 9% during the period subsequent to January 1976.

Generally, these youth came from difficult home situations (two-thirds came from homes with other than two natural or adoptive parents). The mean number of siblings in all clients' families was four.

There was also evidence of social adjustment problems. A comparison of their entry age with school grade level at time of acceptance indicated that they were over one year behind their peers in school; and they averaged 1.8 juvenile convictions at entry.

A closer look at the 228 most recent Florida entries (January 1978 to June 1979) revealed additional information. Upon entry, half of these had prior records of abuse, neglect or desertion; 52% were under state Division of Socio-economic Services care; 59% were under legal commitment; and 17% met Florida delinquency recidivism criteria upon entry. Prison records

existed in 26% of their families.

To furhter describe the entering EWES clients, during the eighteen month period prior to December 1979, the previously described test battery was administered within 30 days of program entry. All instruments provided normative information in standard score formats as well as in either grade equivalents (G.E.) or percentiles. G. E. and percentiles are ordinal measures and their use in statistical manipulation can introduce errors when dealing across test levels and forms. As several forms and levels of the California Achievement Test were administered, calculated Achievement Development Scale Scores (ADSS) were used for all statistical calculations. ADSS permit comparisons or pooling of scores obtained at various times of year on the California Achievement Test; and raw or standard scores on other tests facilitate accurate statistical manipulation. Since Grade Equivalents are approximations and not accurate for grade placement, and percentile ranks are not equal throughout a scale (Tiegs and Clark, 1971, p. 61), these measures are only used after all data manipulations are complete to facilitate approximate comparisons.

The mean raw score of 41 on the Piers-Harris scale equates to the 50th percentile of the norm population (Piers, 1979, p. 11). On the California Test of Personality, the 50th percentile of the norm group equates to scores of approximately 54 on the personal adjustment scale and 60 on the social adjustment scale (Thorpe, Clark, & Tiegs, 1953, p. 29).

Results of the test battery administered to the clients indicated that the mean entering client was: (a) nearly average in self-concept, as measured by the Piers Harris Children's Self-Concept Sclae; (b) below average in personality adjustment, as measured by the California Test of Personality (table 1); and (c) below average in intelligence scores, as measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (mean EWES IQ = 90.7).

However, caution is to be used in such comparisons due to the uniqueness of the group studied. Most normative data, for these tests, was calculated on normal groups and not on institutionalized samples. Of greater interest and more relevant to the evaluation of program outcomes is the direction, amount and pervasiveness of change across measures.

Insert Table 1 about here

Post-Treatment Assessment

The average length of stay in the EWES program was 1.33 years. Of the 996 who left the program as of this study, 74% were judged to have completed treatment and were released normally; 8% were withdrawn by family; 7% ran away; 7% were removed by state or court authorities; and 4% left for miscellaneous other reasons. The entry test battery was administered again immediately prior to release. Tables 1 through 3 indicate score shifts which were statistically significant at the .01 level of confidence.

Self-concept scores increased significantly, and were matched by gains in personal adjustment (table 1). This was not unexpected as the therapy process was aimed at improving self-concept and developing a realistic view of self. Nor was improvement in social adjustment surprising due to the intense group involvement. A significant improvement in reading, mathematics and language achievement scores was also measured during the treatment.

As a primary goal of the program was to modify deviant behavior, an attempt was made to measure such change using the Devereux Adolescent Behavior Rating Scale. The data collected with this instrument indicated that there was improvement in all measured behaviors. Those factors showing significant improvement at the .01 level of confidence are listed in table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Test and subtest scores which significantly improved between entry and departure are listed in table 3. Although all tests listed changed significantly, only those which showed a shift in means of at least 50% of the exiting within-group SD were considered to have a sufficiently large magnitude of change (Cohen & Hyman, 1979). Significant improvements of a high magnitude were thus noted in personality adjustment and self concept. There was also a large reduction in the deviant behaviors of unethical behavior, defiance, dominance, emotional control, physical inferiority, withdrawal, inability to delay gratification, and paranoia.

Insert Table 3 about here

Three studies were conducted which sampled 224 past EWES clients from the total population of about 650 released prior to June, 1977. Additionally, the after-camp records of all 288 released from the Florida camps between January, 1978 and June, 1979, were screened. These follow-up studies included a tabulation of arrest records and interviews with past campers.

Findings indicated that contacted ex-campers reported some difficulty in initially re-entering back-home systems. This finding was supported by the more detailed interview of ex-campers and parents and a review of school records of the 228 most recent releases. This group experienced a 21% delinquency recidivism rate during the first six months and a 10% rate in the second six months after departure. This rate compares favorable with the 28 - 41% recidivism rate, for the first 18 months after release, reported for other group residential programs in the state of Florida (Measurements of Program

Performance and Management, 1978). The subjects interviewed were consistent in the view that the EWES program improved their chances of staying out of trouble and was better than other programs. This opinion was supported by interviewed families of ex-clients.

Discussion

Since establishing its first residential facility, the Eckerd Wilderness Educational System has treated clients who were typically in their early teens, came from high stress and unstable environments, had an unusual amount of academic problems and experienced difficulties which resulted in referral to legal systems. The positive impact of the program was reflected in an independent, concurrent evaluation by the North Carolina Department of Human Resources:

> The profile (of clients) taken as a whole indicates that the camp is admitting children who need the treatment provided; they have identifiable problems supported by test results reflecting similar problems; and they have failed to respond to less intense treatment modalities. Their placement in the Wilderness Camping Program therefore seems appropriate (Profile of Camp Population," 1978, p. 33).

Test results indicated that there were significant short-term gains in the areas of self-concept, personality adjustment, academic achievement and observed behaviors. This seemed to be supported by data in post-program records and interviews. But such changes can be fragile and transitory when youth return to environments where their original problems were shaped. As prior influences are reasserted, prior behaviors may be reassumed. The immediate transition appears to be particularly difficult. The easing of

this shift from the intensely supportive camp environment to the back-home situation, must be addressed if any program is to realize measurable long-term gains.

Acting on evidence provided by this evaluation and other sources, EWES has recently implemented monthly contacts of all Florida ex-campers by program personnel. However, without effective back-home intervention strategies and programs which deal with parental behaviors and the family milieu, long-term beneficial effects may be difficult to achieve. As a preliminary diagnostic step and to improve communications with families, the Child Behavior Check List (Achenbach, 1978), to be administered to parents, is being implemented before and after program entry. Additionally, evaluation instruments which attempt to assess client and parental interaction with the program are being developed.

To maximize replicability, future EWES studies should concentrate more on process evaluation -- what actually occurs as opposed to product objectives. Past evaluations have relied too heavily on stated objectives and the articulation of program elements by program personnel rather than by objective evidence by evaluations. Additionally, it is recommended that evaluation procedures be incorporated in all newly implemented program elements (e.g. transitional classroom, aftercare, follow-up contact programs) to assess effectiveness.

The Eckerd camps appear to be serving a useful function by bringing an alternative program to the field of disturbed youth treatment. Apparent successes should be encouraged and other studies should be conducted which might indicate direction for program improvement and provide insight into causal relationships. The sheer size of the Eckerd program presents a unique opportunity for further study which should be utilized.

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Table 1

Matched Client Scores on the California Achievement Test (CAT), Piers-Harris Self Concept Scale (PH) and California Test of Personality (CTP)

Sub-test		Raw/ADSS Score[a] M	SD	Percentile GE[b]	t[c]	P
			CAT (n=142)			
Reading	Entry	421	110	5.0		
	Exit	467	104	6.6	8.40	.0001
Math	Entry	392	88	5.2		
	Exit	425	93	6.0	8.72	.0001
Language	Entry	421	120	4.8		
	Exit	456	99	5.8	5.31	.0001
			PH (n=157)			
	Entry	51.12	13.03	44		
	Exit	62.98	10.80	77	10.49	.0001
			CTP (n=150)			
Personal Adjustment	Entry	36.91	18.06	20		
	Exit	52.10	20.60	50	8.47	.0001
Social Adjustment	Entry	36.58	19.56	5		
	Exit	49.98	17.56	30	7.86	.0001

Note. [a]Achievement Development Scale Score (ADSS) for CAT and raw scores for PH and CTP.
[b]Approximates of GE of score means for CAT and percentile of score means for PH and CTP.
[c]t Test for differences in means between matched pairs of entry and exit scores on same clients.

Table 2

Matched Entry and Exit Scores[a] on the

Devereux Adolescent Behavior Rating Scale (DAB) for Behavior Factors

Behavior Factor		Raw Score[b] M	(SD)	Norm[c] M	Behavior Factor		Raw Score[b] M	(SD)	Norm[c] M
Unethical	Entry	10.49	(3.21)		Withdrawal	Entry	10.16	(2.43)	
	Exit	8.17	(2.89	9.3		Exit	8.73	(2.23)	9.1
Defiant/	Entry	11.98	(2.87)		Bizarre	Entry	9.60	(2.19)	
Resistive	Entry	9.81	(2.70)	12.0	Speech	Exit	8.53	(2.04)	9.9
Domineering/	Entry	11.80	(3.49)		Bizarre	Entry	8.82	(2.82)	
Sadistic	Exit	9.68	(3.13)	9.9	Action	Exit	7.62	(4.46)	7.8
Emotional	Entry	15.58	(3.39)		Inability	Entry	20.72	(6.03)	
Control	Exit	12.50	(3.16)	14.1	to Delay	Exit	17.80	(5.48)	19.0
Approval	Entry	12.78	(2.57)		Paranoid	Entry	7.54	(1.95)	
Dependency	Exit	11.63	(2.45)	10.7	Thinking	Exit	6.64	(1.65)	6.2
Emotional	Entry	11.26	(3.12)		Self	Entry	11.39	(2.98)	
Distance	Exit	9.84	(2.92)	10.5	Blame	Exit	10.47	(2.84)	10.9
Physical	Entry	13.27	(5.68)						
Inferiority	Exit	10.61	(4.01)	12.0					

Notes. [a]Matched pairs of entry and exit scores on same clients.
[b]Higher scores indicate more of the exhibited adverse behavior.
[c]Means for norm group of disturbed, institutionalized adolescents.
n=137
$p \geq .01$

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Test Scores Which Exhibit a Significant and Large Magnitude of Change Between Entry and Exit

Test	Exiting SD	Diff. in M (%)[a]
CTP		
Personal Adjustment	20.60	15.91 (74)*
Social Adjustment	17.56	13.40 (76)*
Piers-Harris	10.80	11.86 (110)*
DAB		
Unethical	2.89	2.32 (80)*
Defiant/Resistive	2.70	2.17 (80)*
Domineering/Sadistic	3.13	2.12 (68)*
Emotional Control	3.16	3.08 (97)*
Physical Inferiority	4.01	2.66 (66)*
Withdrawal	2.23	1.43 (64)*
Bizarre Speech	2.04	1.07 (52)*
Inability to Delay	5.48	2.92 (53)*
Paranoid Thinking	1.65	.90 (55)*

Note. [a]Number in parenthesis is the percentage the difference mean is of SD.
*Those scores which exhibited a large magnitude of change (mean $\geq$ 50% of SD). Scores for reading, math and language on the CAT and approval dependency, emotional distance, bizarre action, and self-blame on the Devereux shifted significantly ($p \geq .01$) but changes on these scores were not of sufficient magnitude to meet criteria.
$p \geq .01$